FREE RESEARCH RESOURCE / GUIDE 02

Thesis & Dissertation Structure Guide

A chapter-by-chapter roadmap for organizing academic research clearly and responsibly.

Important: Thesis structures differ across disciplines and universities. Always follow your department’s official handbook and your supervisor’s instructions first.

01 Front matter

- Title page: approved title, author, degree, institution and submission details.
- Declaration and approvals: originality statement or approval pages when required.
- Acknowledgements: brief recognition of genuine support.
- Abstract: concise problem, purpose, methods, principal findings and conclusion; write after results are final.
- Contents and lists: table of contents, list of figures/tables and abbreviations if needed.

02 Typical research chapters

- Chapter 1 — Introduction: background, problem, aim, objectives, questions, scope and significance.
- Chapter 2 — Literature Review: critical synthesis, theoretical or conceptual framework and research gap.
- Chapter 3 — Methodology: design, participants or materials, procedures, analysis and ethics.
- Chapter 4 — Results / Findings: organized evidence that addresses each research question.
- Chapter 5 — Discussion: interpret findings, compare with literature, explain limitations and implications.
- Chapter 6 — Conclusion: answer the research questions, summarize contributions and propose future work.

Some institutions combine Results and Discussion or use a manuscript-based thesis format.

03 What belongs in each chapter?

Introduction: Move from broad context to a precise problem. Define key terms and explain why the study is worth conducting.

Literature Review: Organize by themes or debates, assess quality and contradictions, and show how the study follows from existing evidence.

Methodology: Provide enough detail for readers to understand and evaluate the research process. Explain choices, not only procedures.

Results: Present actual findings without fabrication. Number tables and figures consistently, include informative captions, and refer to them in the text.

Discussion: Explain what results mean, alternative interpretations, consistency with prior studies and limits on generalization.

Conclusion: Avoid introducing new results. Connect conclusions to the objectives and evidence.

04 Practical example: aligning chapters

Objective: Assess how students describe barriers to consistent study routines.
Method: Semi-structured interviews with a defined participant group.
Findings: Themes supported by appropriately anonymized excerpts.
Discussion: Compare themes with relevant prior research and acknowledge sampling limitations.

05 References, appendices and academic integrity

- Use one consistent citation style required by the institution (for example APA or IEEE).
- Include only sources actually consulted and cited; verify bibliographic details.
- Place supplementary instruments, consent materials or extended tables in appendices when permitted.
- Report data and analyses truthfully; disclose AI assistance if institutional policy requires it.
- Never submit another person’s writing or invented data as original research.

FINAL REVIEW

Thesis & Dissertation Checklist

A practical final check before supervisor review or formal submission.

Structure and argument

- ☐ The title, abstract and research questions describe the same study.
- ☐ Each chapter has a clear purpose and logical transitions.
- ☐ Findings are traceable to the actual data and methods.
- ☐ Discussion and conclusions are supported by the evidence.

Formatting and references

- ☐ Margins, fonts, spacing and headings follow the university template.
- ☐ Page numbers and front-matter numbering are consistent.
- ☐ Table of contents and lists of tables/figures are updated.
- ☐ Every table/figure has a number, caption and source where needed.
- ☐ In-text citations and reference-list entries match.
- ☐ Appendices are labelled and cited in the main text.

Submission readiness

- ☐ Ethics approvals, consent and confidentiality requirements are met.
- ☐ Spelling, terminology, units and abbreviations are consistent.
- ☐ Supervisor feedback and required revisions have been addressed.
- ☐ The final PDF has been opened and visually checked after export.

Tip: Export the final document to PDF and inspect the title page, contents, section breaks, tables, figures, references and appendices at 100% zoom.

Learning resource notice: This is a general structure guide. Degree-specific rules and disciplinary conventions take precedence.